

## From "clone towns" to "slow towns": examining festival legacies

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# From 'clone towns' to 'slow towns': Examining festival legacies

## **Abstract**

**Purpose** – Examines the role of grassroots (food) festivals for supporting the sustainability of micro and small producers, whilst exploring potential productive linkages between both stakeholders (festivals and producers) for enhancing a more authentic cultural offering and destination image in the visitor economy.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Exploratory, qualitative and inductive. Purposive sampling, drawing on 10 in-depth interviews and 17 open-ended survey responses collected across 2014 and 2015 - drawing perspectives from traders participating in the EAT Cambridge festival.

**Findings** – Unpacks series of serendipitous [as opposed to 'strategic'] forms of festival and producer leveraging; strengthening B2C relationships, and stimulating B2B networking and creative entrepreneurial collaborations. Positive emergent 'embryonic' forms of event legacy are identified that support the longer-term sustainability of local producers and contribute toward an alternative idea of place and destination, more vibrant and authentic connectivity with localities and slower visitor experiences.

**Originality/value** – Emphasises the importance of local bottom-up forms of 'serendipitous leverage' for enhancing positive emergent 'embryonic' legacies that advance 'slow' tourism and local food agendas. In turn this enhances the cultural offering and delivers longer-term sustainability for small local producers - particularly vital in the era of 'Clone Town' threats and effects. Applies Chalip's (2004) Event Leverage Model (ELM) to the empirical setting of EAT Cambridge, and conceptually advances the framework by integrating 'digital' forms of leverage.

**Keywords** – Leveraging, Legacy, Grassroots festivals and events, Small business collaboration, Micro and small producers, Slow tourism.

**Paper type** – Research paper

## Introduction

Micro and small businesses play a critical role in the social and economic vitality and sustainability of urban and local economies (NEF, 2010; Raco and Tunney, 2010), and simultaneously contribute to place marketing, brand recognition and identity development (Everett, 2016). The UK private sector is comprised by over 99.5% small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs), contributing 60% of all private sector jobs (FSB, 2017). The historic city of Cambridge plays home to a high density of SMEs and has the highest average concentration of “new work” SMEs (e.g. digital, technological, and so-called “creative” industries and clusters), with approximately 51% of the city’s SMEs now judged to be in the new work industry (Centre for Cities, 2015). The creative, cultural production of the “EAT Cambridge Festival”, the case study for this paper, exemplifies this form of vibrant industry through the lens of the food and drink sector. The event particularly illustrates how local businesses and producers are leveraging emerging visitor economy opportunities (namely food festival tourism) to foster alternative spaces of consumption and to challenge the Clone Town effect.

The Clone Town effect (a pervasive threat of multinational, global brands and national chains dominating the high street by displacing micro and small enterprises) has emerged as a major challenge found across well-established economies and highly developed urban centres (NEF, 2010). Historic England (2013) argues that such processes continue to potentially damage the cultural and heritage offering, which is a key concern in the touristic-historic city of Cambridge (Duignan and Wilbert, 2017). Although heralded the number 1 Clone Town in the UK by scoring highest on NEF’s (2010) clone score - Cambridge is not alone. NEF’s (2010) report revealed that 41% of the towns surveyed were clone towns compared to the 36% that were home towns. Significant for this study, these statistics reveal the very real threat to small business competitiveness and survival, and illustrates the on-going transformation of diverse urban high street business demographics from small, local independent businesses toward a homogenised offer of multinational, corporate chains. The displacement of small businesses coincides with wider economic challenges for the city, as the Centre for Cities (2017) ranked Cambridge first in a UK top 10 list of least equal cities. Recent reports illustrate the ramification – and explanations of such as the East of England and the South East of England, where this case is located, have – and continue to – display the strongest 12 month increases in prime office and industrial space rent in the UK (RICS Economics, 2017). Structural challenges are further exacerbated by increased local taxation, referred to ‘business rates’ across the country – rising overall by £654m between 2010 and 2017 and serving to erode and finish off the independent offering across UK high streets (The

Guardian, 2017). Weingaertner and Barber (2010) specifically argue that SME food businesses can be particularly susceptible to increases in land values and rents, with the potential to be displaced out of gentrified urban spaces.

Empirically driven, the study addressed two main research questions:

- 1) What are the short and longer-term opportunities for micro and small food and drink producers who participate in grassroots festivals?
- 2) How can food festivals and producers connect and leverage destination development and slower, more diverse cultural forms of the visitor economy to combat Clone Town challenges?

### *Grassroots (food) festivals and the rise of alternative spaces of 'slower' consumption*

Grassroots festivals are typically small, contrasting with mass market forms of cultural-festival production and representing an opportunity for a more localised and bottom up approach to the events portfolio of urban places (Chalip, 2004). These local interventions have a divergent character due to their community driven, and often co-creative and co-produced, approach to stakeholder collaboration (van Niekerk and Getz, 2016) - often narrowly focused on a small minority of local communities (McKercher, Mei and Tse, 2006). As such, they help to facilitate and maintain a sense of local identity, inclusion and community, and collectively contribute to the place identity, brand and cultural offering via city marketing and image creation (Van Aalst and van Melik, 2012; Hawkins and Ryan, 2013).

Place marketing and city branding techniques serve to (re)position, create new and stimulate existing development policies and sustainable community growth strategies (Maheshwari, Vandewalle and Bamber, 2011). Effective place marketing that is founded upon structured brand-driven identity development can put a destination on the map and encourage tourists to visit through the creation and generation of a stronger destination image (Buultjens and Cairncross, 2015; Botschen, Promberger and Bernhart, 2017). Richards (2017) argues that event portfolios play a key role in the development of a more holistic programme of destination development; namely, the process of rethinking, designing and managing public spaces - both as a product of bottom-up community driven initiatives and top-down cultural programmes (Christou, 2017; de Brito and Richards, 2017).

The emergence of these kinds of locally-focused forms of cultural production has the potential to heighten the desire for an instantaneous experience within a so-called “culture of immediacy” (Kleijnen, Ruytor and Wetzels, 2007) or, as Voase (2012) postulated, a growing culture of “instant gratification”. However, whilst grassroots festivals may in some way contribute to a fast-paced and commodified world they too have the propensity to support a slower form of cultural production and touristic experience (Clancy, 2017). Certainly, Quinn (2006) has found that festivals have a social and cultural significance far beyond short-term income generation. These discourses highlight the shift away from everyday neoliberal forms of corporate consumption toward a more alternative, locally-focused mode of critical consumption (Sassatelli and Davolio, 2010; Duignan, Everett, Walsh and Cade, 2017). Festivals have been argued to form alternative spaces of consumption, helping to promote a slower form of life, support small businesses, preserve local cultures and sustain places through a slow movement and agenda (Mayer and Knox, 2006).

Although the concept of ‘slow tourism’ is not without its critics (e.g. Weaver, 2007, who suggests it may be merely a useful promotion tool and veneer for sustainability), the pursuit of alternative and ‘slower’ consumption visitor spaces is perhaps best illustrated by the emergence of food and drink festivals which are central to the marketing strategy for many destinations (Hall and Sharples, 2008; Cavicchi and Santini, 2014). Despite ‘slow tourism’ being a broad concept that covers everything from the slowing down of activity to the pursuit of well-being (Fullager, Markwell and Wilson, 2012), the literature on food festivals particularly encapsulates its central values - engendering a slower pace for tourists and a deeper form of cultural engagement (McKercher and Du Cros, 2003). They offer drivers which help to maintain communities and a sense of place, as well as enabling visitors and locals to engage with the local cultural offering (Blichfeldt and Halkier, 2014). Ultimately, this local identity becomes infused with organic community-driven placemaking practices that enhance destination sustainability (Sofield, Guia and Specht, 2017) and promote alternative consumption patterns (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003). This is particularly vital as food festivals often serve to balance competing, complex narratives that (re)construct and reflect a place’s identity (e.g. Everett, 2015), and can nurture regional regeneration rather than being simply generators of short-term economic wealth (Quinn, 2006; Lee and Arcodia, 2011). This pattern of local reconfiguration is evidenced in studies such as Cela, Knowles-Lankford and Lankford (2007) and Hashimoto and Telfer (2008), where grassroots food festivals are recognised as effective economic levers (Crispin and Reiser, 2008) which can provide valuable long-term income for local people and resist neoliberal discourses in cities and towns (Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Palmer and Probert, 2015).

### *Short and longer-term leveraging and legacies of grassroots festivals*

In the context of events and festivals the concept of leveraging refers to their capacity to be strategically utilised as a resource to attain targeted economic and social outcomes for a host destination (O'Brien, 2007; Ziakas, 2015). Chalip (2004) proposed a general model for event leveraging - the Event Leverage Model (ELM) - designed to explore the immediate and longer-term leverageable opportunities associated with a destination and/or event portfolio (see Figure 1). Leverageable opportunities range from direct trade stimulated by the visitor economy right through to longer-term brand and destination development through exposure by media and external promotional activity; the means serving as specific micro-level tactics to achieve the overarching strategic objectives. Leveraging sustainable benefits for host destinations requires the involvement of a range of stakeholders - from policy makers and directors to micro businesses and visitors.

*Figure 1 - Chalip's (2004) Event Leverage Model*

Ziakas and Boukas (2016) argue that small-scale events afford a greater cross-section of stakeholders the possibility to leverage sustainable social and economic outcomes. In the pre and post-event stages of a festival there can be a range of opportunities, and the bundling of activities should be combined with local services, capabilities and capacity within the region's supply chain (Chalip, 2004). Doing so can retain event and festival expenditure inside the destination and avoid external leakage. Creating strategic convergence between the characteristics of a focal event and the ways a destination wishes to portray its 'distinctive' city marketing and brand may produce tangible benefits for both 'city' and festival stakeholders. As Chalip's (2004) ELM proposes, developing the features and images of the event and incorporating them into the destination's overall marketing mix is the natural outcome of such strategic convergence.

Pappalepore and Duignan (2016) claim that, in the context of wider general event studies, there is a need to explore not only the immediate but also the emerging longer-term 'legacies' of events in local idiosyncratic conditions. The concept of 'event legacy', at both the macro and the local levels, is a much debated implication of events (Preuss, 2007). Although the idea of a 'legacy' is a widely used term in the literature, pertinent for describing something bequeathed and/or left behind after an event, Chalip (2017) suggests that it only denotes impacts formed ten years post-event. The focus of this paper is, however, limited to assessing impacts one to two years after the festival. As such, this paper establishes the idea of 'embryonic legacies' to illustrate the rudimentary and immediate emergent forms of impacts

bequeathed with the potential for development, which may or may not contribute to Chalip's (2017) idea of a longer-term legacy construction.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative, exploratory and inductive in approach, this empirically driven research draws on primary data collected in 2014 and 2015 during and after one of Cambridgeshire's (UK) largest food and drink festivals: 'EAT Cambridge'. The festival houses approximately 55 traders, lasting for two full weeks, inclusive of over 40 different fringe events and two main 'event days' in the city centre (EAT Cambridge, 2017). Primary data was generated through a non-probability purposive sampling method (Yin, 2013), directly targeting participating micro and small producers and key informants across the food and drink community directly involved with the festival – a similar approach to both Blichfeldt and Halkier (2014) and Duignan et al., (2017). In total, 17 open-ended survey data responses (2014) were collected from producers, and 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews (2015) based on initial themes from 2014 were conducted. Table 1 below outlines specific individuals and organisations interviewed, inclusive of the type and focus of the organisation, the primary data collection method used, and their respective aliases used for the findings section.

The sample selection was based on: i) direct participation in the festival as traders, ii) close geographical proximity to Cambridge(shire), and iii) their stakeholder interest(s) and core knowledge of key aspects of food and drink place development issues across Cambridge and the wider region. Furthermore, with respect to the aforementioned issues related to gentrification, local producer sustainability, and resultant 'clone town' effects, the sample chosen represents exactly the types of small businesses impacted by such urban development processes. Specific questioning examined aspects of 'leverage', cultural and 'slow' tourism opportunities and challenges, and their participation in and viewpoint around the importance of the festival for the longer-term sustainability of local producers – aligned against the preceding research questions posed by this study. Primary, empirical evidence generated for the findings of the study was supported by secondary data gathered through an analysis of EAT Cambridge's website, strategic programming and fringe event offerings, and other related festival sites (e.g. FoodPark, 2017) that have spawned from the initial occurrence of EAT Cambridge.

*Table 1 - Interviewee list*

Systematically organising emerging themes from 2014 and 2015, the authors utilised the qualitative analysis software NVivo V10 to break down and code textual data. Supporting thematic development, Attride-Stirling's (2001) 'Thematic Networks Analysis' was used to build theoretical ideas based on the specific evidence gathered, helping to formulate the structure of the argument used throughout the literature review, findings and discussion. In order to enhance 'descriptive validity' (Maxwell, 1992) all four authors independently analysed primary data sets and identified key themes to situate the development of the paper.

## **Findings and discussions**

### *'Serendipitous leverage' across and beyond EAT Cambridge*

Before, during and after EAT Cambridge producers engaged in a number of ad-hoc, serendipitous forms of immediate and longer-term leveraging activities. Business to business (B2B) networking, relationship building and creative collaborative tactics were found. Social media played, and continues to play, a major role in bridging the gap between the physicality of the event and its digital, online presence with platforms for ongoing communication (e.g. Twitter and Facebook). These spaces seemed key to fostering not only B2B, but business to consumer (B2C) networking, relationships between producers and festivals (and their directors), and relationships with policy organisations like the regional DMO: Visit Cambridge and Beyond. Overall, the festival fostered new serendipitous opportunities for event leveraging in three key ways: firstly, via networking and new forms of (digital) collaboration. Secondly, through the creation of new spaces and alternative (physical) vehicles of 'critical consumption'. Thirdly, through reinvigorated place-branding and reputation building. These key aspects emerged as the most coded elements in the data and seemed to be contributing to an emergent and embryonic legacy for the city, visitors and local businesses.

Firstly, traders suggested that the event helped them to "build social media followers and get connected to Cambridge foodies" (BDM2), and connect to EAT Cambridge's "all round coverage on Twitter" (BR2) - using the Twittersphere to piggyback onto the online social presence of the festival. EAT Cambridge offered a range of physical and digital marketing platforms for producers to lever: from social media and programme brochures right through to being named in the festival director's food and drink blog. Producers identified that being integrated into a range of festival-related activities, like those mentioned above, as well as associative "fringe" events, provided lifelines to get their name out into the locality and



region (BCC1, BR2) for “more local marketing” and an “increase in exposure” (CNE3, FDMP2).

Producers placed a strong emphasis on networking and collaborating with the businesses they could potentially supply or work with in the future (BCC3, BCC4, BDM4, BDM5, CNE4, FDMP5, FDMP6, FDS1). Synergies between organisations varied from very basic forms of connectivity to rather complex joint ventures. Examples of basic forms included: i) swapping business cards and coming up with ad-hoc arrangements where producers and suppliers stocked products from local businesses who attended EAT Cambridge (FDMP4), right through to ii) EAT Cambridge putting two local breweries “in touch with restaurants and other outlets” where their products could be then stocked and sold (BDM2, BDM3). Examples of more complex relationships included: i) collaborations on new innovative product design and development - for example doubling up on themed events, and even combined products (i.e. a separate gin and ice cream company coming together to make a gin flavoured ice cream), right through to ii) a local saffron grower (FDMP6) noting how the festival had provided “collaborative work with local breweries, wine retailers, cheese merchants and bakers to form new supply chains and pairing events with coffee”.

Producers claimed that this “wider range of interesting collaborations is part down to EAT Festival Cambridge” (BCC3), “drawing everyone together” (BDM6) - affording them the opportunity to instantly market their brand B2C and B2B. O’Brien (2007) demonstrates how the provision of networking spaces for festival sponsors and official partners by organisers at a regional surfing festival, combined with the neat cultural fit of the festival in the host community, produces serendipitous leveraging outcomes in the form of new B2B relationships. An interesting finding from the current study is that, with Cambridge’s strong foodie culture, there was a similar neat cultural fit between the festival and the host community, and comparable physical spaces for B2B networking. However, the catalytic effect of digital and social media communication platforms, not available at the time of O’Brien’s (2007) study, was obvious in promoting connectivity and collaboration in both the B2B and B2C senses.

### *Inspiring a ‘slower’ festival embryonic legacy*

Repeatedly, empirical evidence illustrated an eclectic range of creative and slower forms of food and drink collaboration across different producers. Indeed, the festival provided an overarching physical and digital umbrella encompassing an eclectic range of stakeholders. This was of particular importance for producers, as several respondents argued for a strong

development of Cambridge's foodie identity as the city's brand does not fully reflect, and showcase, the current quality and diversity of offerings available (e.g. FDMP5). One producer claimed that the food and drink culture has the "potential to become the single, most important thing in towns and cities" (BR1) with respect to a slower cultural offering and destination development strategy. Through fostering the city brand in this way the food and drink scene could act as a beacon and serve to attract visitors to enhance the demand not only of EAT Cambridge, but also of other associative events (e.g. FoodPark, and ThirstyFest). This includes promoting local slow food and drink generally, and helping to "advertise other local attractions like the museums" (BCC2). Narratives amplified by this study allude to a community empowered to promote a 'slower' movement, to shift visitor spending away from corporates and toward local spaces.

Secondly, evidence from the current study suggests that EAT Cambridge has acted as a catalyst to engender new B2B relationships that have galvanised interest in food and drink across the city and prompted the growth of new events and initiatives. The food festival thus serves as an emergent embryonic legacy delivered as a hallmark, yearly event as a key highlight in the foodie tourism calendar, specifically at the local, regional level but also attracting international visitors. As demonstrated in earlier research by O'Brien (2006) and O'Brien and Gardiner (2007) business relationships formed through events can generate sustainable legacies for host communities. Indeed, these relationships across the new work sector have spawned the production of new, locally-focused grassroots events and festivals similar to EAT Cambridge. The first includes smaller scale versions of EAT Cambridge, developed by the director herself under the umbrella of FoodPark (2017), encompassing three different types of FoodPark event, including:

- a) *FoodPark street food stops* - including anywhere between two and five street food vendors occupying random public and commercial spaces across the city serving transient visitor crowds and businesses in a lunch-time style trade format.
- b) *FoodPark fringe evening events and night markets* – night time festival-esque atmosphere, typically bringing 10 to 15 local traders together in a private rented space with a fee to enter.

EAT Cambridge and affiliated FoodPark events spearheaded by Cambridge's popular food blogger Heidi Sladen, has more recently been complemented by a new network of similar festivals and events leveraged by producers under the umbrella of "ThirstyFest". ThirstyFest is run by a separate food and drink entrepreneur the city and the owner of a popular bar in

Cambridge called Thirsty. This initiative covered a series of weekend events offering social spaces for around 5-8 local street food and drink traders and music - including a number of seasonal variations - from 'Après Ski' themed event venues in the winter to St Patrick's Day. Furthermore, in 2017 ThirstyFest introduced an eclectic mix of themed events in novel, innovative destinations across Cambridge - transforming public spaces that have traditionally never hosted cultural food and drink events of this scope. An example of this was the 2017 Thirsty Riverside Biergarten, a collaborative project creating social food and drink spaces utilising the green spaces of a marginal local attraction: the University of Cambridge Technology museum. The on-going emergence of new alternative food and drink spaces affords participating traders with unique opportunities to leverage - serving an eclectic emergent serendipitous events portfolio across the city and beyond.

Interestingly, another key embryonic legacy of EAT Cambridge is not just the continuation of the festival itself, and other festivals that have spawned from it, but also the creation of the Grub Club Cambridge (2017). Several producers highlighted the emerging importance of associated street food sites and networks since the festivals launch (BCC3). Producers spoke of the Grub Club as a major platform for simply connecting likeminded individuals and entrepreneurs (FDMP4), sharing ideas for their personal businesses, and promoting the collective identity of the city's food and drink scene (BR1). Enhancing business relationships and nurturing B2C and B2B relationships is often a key priority for hosting festivals (Chalip, 2004; O'Brien, 2007). Effective cultivation of networking opportunities, and synergies between events and local business communities, have been argued as critical success factors for event sustainability (O'Brien, 2006, 2007). From the formation of Grub Club, sustained social media connectivity between the festival, initiatives and businesses on Twitter and Facebook via followers, likes and lines of communications across B2B and B2C networks illustrate the power to develop online communities above and beyond the physicality of the event itself. Digital and physical spaces that serve as a key lifeline for small business sustainability and survival in the era of clone town threats.

The festival created spaces for bottom-up community initiatives to form. In light of this, as one respondent pointed out, "EAT Cambridge has enabled local traders to come together and show the people of the city what a wonderful and diverse collection of local talent and craft made products are available on their own doorstep" (BCC5). Others claimed that EAT Cambridge, and other events that have developed since, had "heightened everyone's interest in the area" (BCC2), and that the growth of more frequent festivals like EAT Cambridge will "help to grow small businesses and get the knowledge out there". Repeatedly, promoting small businesses to the community was deemed as vital for "consciously marketing ourselves

to this sector of the Cambridge community” (BCC4 and reflected on by CNE2, CNE3) and in order to “raise the food profile of the whole city” (FDMP2).

Thirdly, several businesses put forward the idea of developing Cambridge into a long-term (food and drink) festival city, acknowledging that there is a burgeoning food and drink community across the city and that Cambridge's reputation as a foodie destination is improving - driven forward by the organisers of the event (FDS2, FDS3). Several stallholders implied that it would make a major difference if there was a more strategic approach to a structured portfolio of events taking place across the city's calendar (BCC1, BDM2, FDMP5). Respondents recognised that the current events portfolio was rather piecemeal and not joined up fully in places across the city (BCC1, BDM6). In this sense a coordinated leveraging strategy could enhance the atmosphere and overall quality of the event for local businesses (Chalip and Leyns, 2002). However, in order to plan for a more strategic approach to event leverage Chalip and Leyns (2002) raise the question of who is ultimately responsible for creating, fostering, and leveraging a portfolio of events and festivals in the city. Whilst a structured programme of public events and festivals (from the Big Weekend to the County Food and Drink Show) are supported by local government, inclusive of Cambridge City Council, and associated contracts with Cambridge Live (see Cambridge Live, 2017), the authors argue that it is an organic approach from the foodie community that has spawned an alternative, locally focused food and drinks festival programme in the city. The need to integrate strategic city-wide programming, and serendipitous more-organic initiatives together coherently to capture the city's culturally diverse destination offering emerges as vital in the context of Cambridge.

### *Leveraging digital legacies*

Based on the analysis presented, Figure 2 illustrates how producers and festival organisers utilised leveraging attempts and fostered potential embryonic legacies, using the ELM as a framework on which to hang empirical analysis. Leveraging of the festival's physical and digital characteristics can take a variety of forms - as illustrated above and reflected through the author's extension and adaptation of Chalip's (2004) ELM (Figure 1). Chalip's (2004) analysis largely precludes digital platforms such as those highlighted by this study as it was developed over 13 years ago, before the exponential growth of such media. It was also not adopted in a food and drink tourism context. A digital component has been specifically added to the leverage model here to reflect the changing contours of event and festival leverageable opportunities - both immediately and with respect to the formation of the embryonic legacies discussed.

For small and micro food producers to leverage the short- and longer-term opportunities presented by the festival, evidence suggests that a grounded, integrated approach and the involvement of a range of stakeholders is required. Opportunities relate to the small food producers and suppliers involved in the festival and traditional communications and digital media strategies. The festival can enhance the host destination's image using tactics aligned with the regional DMO: Visit Cambridge and Beyond, and by integrating the characteristics of the brand. The techniques for enticing visitor spending and lengthening visitor stays include bundling activities and attractions in the region, in this case Cambridgeshire. Certainly, digital networks sustained in relation to the event(s) serve to re-inforce themselves by promoting follow up events related to the food and drink scene as evidenced by connectivity between EAT Cambridge, FoodPark and Thirsty events. It is important to create and enhance business relationships and connections by providing opportunities for local food organisations to network with other local businesses as well as consumers. Digital technology and social platforms clearly play a major role in amplifying the micro and smaller producer offer, support new means of distribution to existing and potential consumers, whilst adding to their collective capabilities to enhance the destination's brand for a more authentic, overarching slow visitor experience.

*Figure 2 - Extended “Event Leverage Model” in a food and drink festival context (Adapted from Chalip’s, 2004 original model)*

## **Conclusions**

The paper unpacks a series of ad-hoc immediate and potential longer-term opportunities and embryonic legacies that grassroots food festivals present for small local producers. Empirical data from EAT Cambridge illustrate the ways in which festivals enhance a slower cultural offering, something pertinent for place development in light of the pervasive Clone Town threat. The authors argue that festivals can act as a key agent, at the local level, for promoting a more locally-focused, authentic food and drink city brand and cultural offering - embedding the principles of slow tourism, food and drink. By doing so such movements serve to dampen or negate some of the challenges associated with urban development processes associated with gentrification and emerging Clone Town effects. In other words, festivals may manifest as a potential antidote to the pervasive threat around the corporatisation of cultural offerings. We argue that both the physical and digital networking activity engendered by EAT Cambridge currently supports a stronger sustainable local, economic embryonic legacy for small providers in and around the city.

Furthermore, this research has contributed empirically and conceptually to the ELM framework and theory of leverage. Indeed, EAT Cambridge has been found to exemplify how festivals can provide exceptional platforms for fostering creative and ongoing collaborations between businesses. Yet, whilst important it is important to note that festivals, in of themselves, as a product of successful creation of networks and business groups can emerge as elite networks. Therefore, we argue they must be open and fluid enough to include new producers of food and drink production within destinations to be egalitarian in nature and expand the local offer.

The findings revealed a series of exploitable tactics used to effectively leverage in both the short and long-term, before, during and beyond the EAT Cambridge festival – interesting practices that may prove useful for local producers in the application of similar cultural events. Empirical advancements based on the findings of EAT Cambridge flesh out Chalip's (2004) ELM model and, given the overarching importance of digital media and social platforms, the model was extended in this study by including digital media in the overarching leverage framework. We argue that such digital connections and networks between businesses, and with consumers, emerge as vital to a longer-term legacy. However, we recognise that effective digital leverage is largely determined by the digital literacy of the individual business – of whom may or may not have the operational and/or strategic skills, knowledge and competencies to create, maintain and leverage digital networks. Therefore, not only should we be concerned with strategic processes of leveraging networks, but the educational aspects regarding 'how' they develop digital literacies to afford and encourage effective leveraging – a key managerial and research implication of this study.

Cultural festivals, especially those at grassroots level, can be manoeuvred as platforms to support local businesses and social sustainability and for preserving the place identity of a city or region. The findings echo de Brito and Richard's (2017) argument that successful event-based placemaking uses longer-term event and festival processes of the imagery and identity of a place to influence its leverageable assets to enhance their visibility and, consequently, proliferate through networks. Here, it is apparent that leveraging both the tangible and intangible festival aspects can be significant for organisers in developing authenticity (Hawkins and Ryan, 2013), a growing phenomenon in the context of the global visitor economy and central to the touristic experience (Hinch and Higham, 2011). The linkages between grassroots festivals and slower forms of tourism and cultural offerings, as indicated by Conway and Timms (2010), serve as inclusive enclaves where small-scale, local micro and small businesses can be established, supported and coordinated. This 'slow shift'

has, at its heart, the power to promote and support small businesses and preserve local cultures and traditions, as postulated earlier by Mayer and Knox (2006) - where visitor spend can be appropriately diverted away from corporate, global spaces to local spaces that promote slow towns over Clone Towns.

What we can see though is the heavy reliance upon key stakeholders across the local community to stimulate alternative spaces for businesses to leverage. It was identified that, whilst organisations like Cambridge Live and Visit Cambridge and Beyond play a major role in stimulating a city programme of events and festivals, ad-hoc grassroots and community-driven interventions can be key in supporting a form of serendipitous leveraging, complementing a city-wide strategic programming of leverageable events. We must however recognise the contingent and contextual dependencies of such line of argumentation given the eclectic and varying stakeholders and related interests in the organisation and development of the city.

Taken one step further the findings from this food festival study suggest that regional government and DMOs may wish to become more strategic with respect to SMEs in the cultural industries by recognising the value of grassroots festivals for stimulating local commerce and building their destination brand. Thus, by actively incorporating grassroots festivals into regional event portfolios, the leveraging outcomes need not be serendipitous but strategic. Duignan and Wilbert (2017) argue that it is through bridging key regional stakeholders and fostering strong communication between policy, academic and industry networks that strategic movements fostering a more locally-focused slower food, drink and cultural tourism movement can be enhanced. As a result, examining 'how' such tripartite relationships can be fostered productively at the local and regional level to support such change poses a key research challenge going forward.

Grassroots festivals represent an attempt to "glocalise" and democratise the cultural offering of late capitalist cities - opening up more opportunities to stimulate a more critical and sustainable form of consumption and prevent economic leakage. By doing so such actions may help to better distribute visitor and local spending, and support a type of growth - and regional development - that is socially and economically inclusive. To fully realise the potential benefits of grassroots festivals, however, tourism managers and policy makers must grapple with the challenge of balancing the ideals and values of the local community whilst simultaneously using festivals as a strategic tool for stimulating visitor spending for local, micro and smaller enterprises, destination development and redistributing economic outputs.

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